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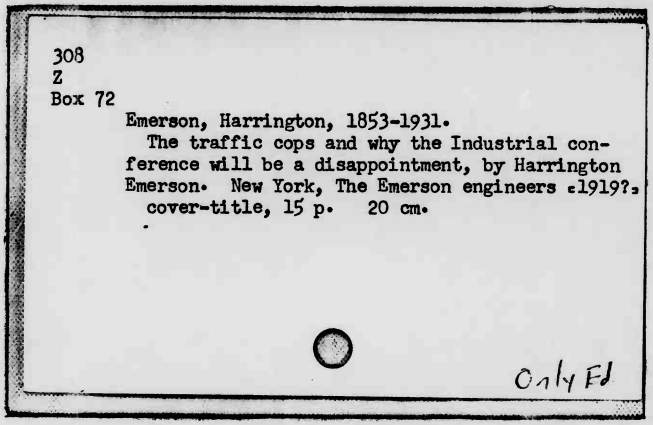
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The Traffic Cops

and

Why the Industrial Conference Will Be a Disappointment

by

HARRINGTON EMERSON

THE EMERSON ENGINEERS
EFFICIENCY COUNSELLORS
HARRINGTON EMERSON, Director
30 CHURCH STREET
NEW YORK

22 March, 1920 - C.R.W.

This essay was originally written on request for one of the New York dailies, but not printed. It was in substance given as an address at a dinner at the Pennsylvania Hotel on October 11th to the National Association of Employment Managers. It was then rewritten in present form October 17th, but owing to printers' strike in New York, printing and publication was unfortunately delayed until after the failure prophesied had occurred.

THE TRAFFIC COPS

And Why the Industrial Conference Will Be a Disappointment

An industrial conference is in session at Washington. It was called together for a great end, to increase industrial harmony. It is made up of many eminent and fine men.

The cause and occasion and opportunity are great. Precedents are there; the pow-wows of Indian chiefs; the Church called great councils all through the middle ages, to settle and stabilize the tenets of the Christian faith. Protestants as well as Catholic churches accept the decisions of the earlier councils.

The meeting which made our Declaration of Independence was a conference that lighted a new light for the world. The constitutional convention was another great conference.

Even the conferences which we call National Conventions of the great political parties, have on occasion produced platforms of value.

The Peace Conference in Paris—that is another story, not to be mixed with this analysis of the Industrial Conference in Washington.

Why will this Industrial Conference be a disappointment and therefore a world failure?

I shall answer indirectly by an analogy which we can all understand.

There are difficulties every second of the day, at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, New York. It is the densest traffic intersection in the world.

Let us analyze the compound problem into its separate parts. The main divisions are the two streams, one flowing both north and south, the other flowing both east and west. Each north or south flowing stream may intend to deflect either east or west, each east or west flowing stream may intend to deflect either north or south.

Wholly apart from the intersection problem and the corner turning problem, each stream is divided against itself, one-half flowing in one direction and the other half in the opposite direction. So much for movement, aim and direction.

Each stream is itself as to its composition divided into two main and hostile parts, vehicles and foot passengers. The vehicles are in addition subdivided into gas and horse vehicles and each of these divisions is again subdivided into public and private conveyances. The foot passengers are subdivided into those hastening on business and those strolling for pleasure.

But these are not all the interests involved. There are, bordering the streets, buildings, whose occupants are deeply interested in the smooth flow of traffic. Some of these buildings contain stores and offices, others are dwellings and still others are public institutions.

In general, both the occupants of the buildings and the people on the streets are interested in smooth, convenient, rapid flow of traffic.

Let us suppose that Mayor Hylan calls an Industrial Conference to discuss traffic conditions at this intersection, and he appoints three groups:

The bus conductors.
The bus passengers.
The occupants of the upper offices.

The bus conductors refusing to allow passengers to board full busses and refusing to allow passengers to alight except at designated places, had exasperated the bus passengers, and the two classes were making an unseemly disturbance. Therefore, these two classes were put on the commission. The occupants of the upper offices seemed furthest removed from the local squabble, and they were high up, so they were also put on.

I submit that a traffic conference, composed of these three groups would be a disappointment and a failure for two principal reasons:

(1) The only overlord, the competent autocrat, the final and experienced authority, the "traffic cop," is not represented in the conference. It is the right of the "traffic cop" to say "stop" and "go" and it is the duty of all the others on the street implicitly to obey him.

(2) A conference composed of bus conductors and bus passengers and office dwellers is representative of two small classes only of the many classes directly interested in sound traffic conditions. The walkers who never use busses, the occupants of private automobiles, have rights not to be settled by any agreement between bus conductors, bus passengers and office occupants.

Is there any dissent from this exposition or from the conclusion that a conference whose delegates were so narrowly appointed and with no representation given to the traffic cop, would be a disappointment and a failure?

Let us turn to the Washington Industrial Conference problem, and analyze it, as we did the traffic congestion. Three great divisions of our people are concerned with industrial peace:

The Producers and Distributors.
The Consumers and Savers.
The Morality Cops.

The producers and distributors are of five kinds:

(1) The actual annexers of raw materials furnished by nature.
(2) The transporters of materials and persons.
(3) The storers of property and persons.
(4) The manufacturers of property.
(5) The exchangers of property.

In each class there are many subdivisions as:

(*a*) Those who can discover, invent, design.
(*b*) Those who can administer and direct.
(*c*) Those who furnish the materials used.
(*d*) Those who furnish the directed work and skill.
(*e*) Those who furnish the equipment, including money.
(*f*) Those who can advertise.
(*g*) Those who can sell.
(*h*) Those who can collect.

These five classes and their eight divisions, forty in all, constitute the producing and distributing group. They ought to work together in order and harmony, even if their interests are apparently diametrically opposed. Just as the northbound bus has no right to stop and quarrel with the southbound automobile with which it has collided, so no subdivision or class of the producing group has any right to balk and block the middle of the road. Both damaged auto and bus should be pulled into some side street. Fullest liberty of action, even to fighting it out on the side streets, should be reserved to those inclined to quarrel, but not to the detriment of the moving streams of traffic. Division (*b*) those who direct, and division (*d*) those who are directed, are both parts of the producing group but not by any means all of it.

The consuming and saving group, corresponding to the business and other dwellers in the

houses, can also be subdivided into many divisions. Its main interest is, however, that all the producers and all the distributors shall produce and distribute promptly and efficiently.

But civilization means that all groups, producers and distributors, consumers and savers, as well as every class and division of each group shall be absolutely subject to the morality authorities, men authorized indeed, as the traffic cops are, by local rulers, but clothed with authority that far transcends any power of local ruler, however democratically appointed. The morality authorities antedate civilization, they are the foundations on which all civilization rests, they are far older and more fundamental than the human race. They have the same authority over and obligation towards civilization that parents have over and towards their children. The family is the real human unit, it is the start for civilization, because held together by the moralities.

The morality authorities are six. What moralities do parents impose (note the word impose) on their children?

(1) Co-operation, the duty of getting along with mother, with father, with the other members of the family. This obligation is imposed on the new born infant from the first day of its life.
(2) Hygiene, the obligation of health as to food, sleep, clothing, shelter, avoidance of accidents, contagion, etc.
(3) Straight morality, the obligation to self and to others. Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not kill; love thy neighbor as thyself.
(4) Education, the obligation to develop far the latent possibilities of mind, of body and of spirit, and the acquirement of special skill.
(5) The application of co-operation, of health, of unrightness, of education in Industrial Competence, the actual doing everything well.

(6) Vocational aptitude, the following of the inborn talent or bent, without which neither extreme skill nor permanent satisfaction is possible.

The parents who have succeeded in imposing until they become second nature, these six moralities ties on their children need not worry about bequeathing fortunes or positions. The children morally equipped will find their own high place.

Civilization means that these same moralities are to be, must be, imposed on all the people, on all producers and distributors, on all consumers and savers.

No man or woman or class has any individual right not to co-operate, as we very soon found out, during the great war. No man or woman has any right to be a carrier of disease or of contagion, or to maintain a nuisance to health, even as innocuous as a bad smell. No man or woman has any right to run amuck and kill or steal, or even to deal in forbidden stuff, nor to violate any of the many laws against crimes.

No man or woman has any right to undertake any work for which he or she is not legally competent, as running a boiler and engine, or putting up medicines, or practising medicine, law, or teaching school or operating a vessel.

Industrial Competency, one of the greatest of the moralities, is just beginning to be recognized by a backward civilization. Incompetence is as much an immorality as refusal to co-operate, as wickedness, as disease, or as ignorance. Whatever work men or women undertake to perform, they should be competent. The old guilds recognized this—first apprentice, then journeyman, then master. However humble the work, this old law and custom ought to prevail.

I know an Italian waiter, who for sixteen years steadily prepared himself in the chief European capitols, to become a first class butler in a great English household. I knew an English girl of sixteen, who steadily for fourteen years prepared

herself to become head child's nurse in a great English family. This thorough preparation is the meaning of industrial competence, whether in nurse girl or in industrial corporation head.

That man or that woman, however lowly or highly placed, is a swindler, a detriment to society, who accepts the stipulated pay and fails to deliver the full measure of competency.

Vocation Aptitude is the sixth great morality, the last of all, because civilization must be far advanced before men can give their lives to what they can do well, rather than to what they must do in order to live. Nevertheless the obligation is upon society and upon every worker in society to select those occupations for which there is aptitude.

These six moralities, imposed on children by parents and teachers, are and must be imposed on organized society by the great authoritative teachers.

These teachers have authority because they have good will, competence, courage, charm, and are properly empowered. The traffic cop cannot succeed without all these qualities. A blue coat, a cap, a whistle and a club are not enough. This is much more the case with the morality authorities of the world. Their real power comes from within, not from without, their authority is just as imperative, whether they are commissioned or not. The obligation to obey is as great, even if no penalty follows disobedience. Are Christ's teachings less imperative, because he was crucified?

General Gorgas has recently made a world announcement of astounding value and significance.

"Yellow fever, that great scourge of tropical America, is now extinct. This is the first time in history that a scourge has been conquered by man." Could Congress or all the nations of the tropics have legislated even an abatement of

yellow fever? The wisdom and wealth of France broke down at Panama, conquered by yellow fever!

The nations of the world had only to obey the traffic cop as to hygiene, the morality authority as to disease and yellow fever disappeared.

Where are the traffic cops as to the six moralities in the President's Industrial Conference? They are not even recognized as the all important group, and because they are not there with the supreme authorities, the conclusions arrived at are without competence and are binding on no man's conscience.

What are the three groups appointed? Not even three groups, since two of them are subdivisions of a single group!

Employes.
Employers.
Public.

It has already been shown that employes and employers, those directed and those directing, are only a small part of the Producing or Distributing group. These two groups cannot enter into any agreement (as they have always been too willing, even anxious to do), to violate the laws of any one of the six moralities. Employers and employes cannot agree to make phosphorous matches or to work young children or not to manufacture or sell intoxicants.

Employer and employe and public opinion as well, in Germany, were well nigh unanimously agreed to make war, to violate treaties and outrage peaceful neighbors, but the unanimous agreement, backed by extreme competence and great courage (good will and charm were lacking), did not work. The traffic cops of the world called out their reserves, one after another, until the violators of co-operation, of world safety, of world health, of world industrial competence were beaten back and down, into a defeat,

as the rector of the great university of Berlin now says, greater than the defeat of Carthage by Rome.

German health and Prussian vocational aptitude for war did not save them.

What the President ought to have done is obvious. He ought to have appointed a great leader and his assistants, heads of subdivisions to represent the Producers-Distributors. He ought to have appointed a great leader and his assistants to represent the Consumers-Savers. He ought to have appointed the world's greatest co-ordinator to head the group of the six moral authorities. Disagreements of the subdivisions of groups among themselves, like the traffic quarrels on Fifth Avenue, should have been referred to the six moral heads for the six different moral laws governing the case.

These minor disputes settled, the greater questions of national, of world wide import, should have been referred, whether the two main groups of Producers and Distributors, of Consumers and Savers agreed or not, to the separate six counsellors, separate, not joint, because no physician can pass on industrial competence, nor can any moralist pass on vocational aptitude.

Not with any desire to claim a competence that transcends in the present formative age, any single brain, but to illustrate the kind of council or conference that might have been called, I can imagine ex-President Taft being called to head the Consuming and Saving group (who could represent it better?) and ex-President Roosevelt, a man of action, had he been living, called to head the Producing and Distributing group.

Passing to the more important group of the six great moralities, co-ordination, I can imagine Herbert Hoover, the greatest co-ordinator the world has as yet produced on a world scale, called to head the co-ordinating division. I can imagine

Cardinal Mercier, now in this country humbly requested to head the moral division, General Gorgas, opportunely back from his yellow fever victory, called to head the hygiene division.

President Eliot, whose opinion and experience in education is unsurpassed (but whose experience is *nil* and his opinion harmful as to Profit sharing), called to head the educational division. There remain two more divisions of world moralities, Industrial Competence, Vocational Aptitude, moralities so new that world recognized authorities have not yet arisen and perhaps do not yet exist.

Of Americans, the late James Mapes Dodge, President of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, head of a Link Belt Engineering Company, might most competently and persuasively, courageously and with broad good will, have filled the position of Industrial Competence arbiter.

As to vocational aptitude, even less does a world authority exist, and it would have been worse than useless to appoint a committee of the representatives of the different methods of ascertaining vocational aptitudes, for the adepts are still so insistent on their own particular methods and so hostile to all others, that they could not have agreed.

Such a conference, with carefully and widely selected delegation under the heads mentioned

WORLD MORALITIES.	AUTHORITY.
Co-ordination	Herbert Hoover
Righteousness	Cardinal Mercier
Hygiene	General Gorgas
Education	Charles Eliot
Industrial Competence	James Mapes Dodge
Vocational Aptitude	
Producers-Distributors	Theodore Roosevelt
Consumers-Savers	Wm. H. Taft

would have been worth while and might have resulted in conclusions that would have been the dawn of a new civilization.

That I have selected two men, no longer living, to illustrate the plan, simply emphasizes that great leaders and authorities are rare.

Each of these leaders has or had in high degree the four qualities that are the bases of all great authority, good will toward humanity, great competence, great courage and great personal charm.

But because the moralities are neither represented nor given even counseling representation, because the producing group and the consuming group as such are not represented, because the conference is made up of the two small groups of work directors and work directed and of a vague public group, because already the conference concerns itself not with world or ultimate or even proximate problems, but with such an incident as the steel workers' strike, because it is attempting to force collective bargaining as to matters that in many cases not even individuals have the right to bargain about or to agree to, the conference to date is and will be A DISAPPOINTMENT and, considering the opportunity, A FAILURE.

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